United Nations E/ICEF/2009/13

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: Limited
8 May 2009

Original: English

For information

United Nations Children's Fund
Executive Board
Annual session 2009
8-10 June 2009
Item 7 of the provisional agenda*

Report on the field visit to Nepal by members of the Executive Board of UNICEF**

Introduction

1. When eight-year-old Sunita enters the gate of the Child Contact Centre at Matepani at 11 a.m., she has already been working all morning: washing glasses, polishing cutlery, cleaning everything her tiny fingers can reach better than those older than her. Sunita wears a little tin ring on her right index finger, and every now and then she fumbles for it with the thumb of her right hand. She doesn't reveal whether she takes it off before going back to work, but it is obvious that it is the most precious thing she owns. The ring was a free gift when she bought a lottery ticket for three rupees one day. With the ring she also received a little hope for free — a way out of her current life. Sunita spends two hours at the Centre learning how to read. The teacher is very kind. Like most of the children who come to the Centre, she dreams of becoming a teacher on day. Sunita has been working for three months in a little restaurant not far away from the Centre. Her boss and the Contact Centre's staff have an agreement that the girl must be back at the restaurant after two hours sharp. During the late shift there is more work to be done: the little girl is needed for food delivery in the neighbourhood. Nobody knows what she earns for her full-time job. A generous owner may pay 500 rupees (not even $7) per month. Sunita hands over what little money she receives to her parents, helping them to support the family. By giving their little daughter away to work, her parents may have saved her from starvation. Sunita is thus one of the lucky ones.

2. Sunita's story is only one spotlight on the harsh destiny of a child growing up in Nepal. The stories of millions of others could be told. But it highlights some of the most pressing challenges the children of Nepal are facing: extreme poverty and the grinding threat of starvation, forcing parents to give their children away. For too many children, survival means child labour, and the lack of education will remain as long as the vicious circle of poverty persists. Therefore, achieving Millennium Development Goal 1 (eradicating extreme poverty and hunger) needs to be the highest priority in Nepal.

* *E/ICEF/2009/8.*
** Submission of this report was delayed due to the timing of the Executive Board's field visit.

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I. Objectives of the visit

3. Members of the UNICEF Executive Board — H.E. Mr. Mikhail Savostianov, Deputy Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations; Mr. Markus Weidling, Counsellor of Development Affairs at the Permanent Mission of Germany to the United Nations; Ms. Allison Booker, First Secretary of the Permanent Mission of Bahamas to the United Nations; Mr. Yoseph Kassaye, First Secretary of the Permanent Mission of Ethiopia to the United Nations; Mr. Changfeng Shao, Second Secretary of the Permanent Mission of the People's Republic of China to the United Nations; and Ms. Elena Manfrina, Programme Manager, Global Institutions, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, Federal Department of Foreign Affairs of Switzerland — visited the Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal from 30 March to 8 April 2009. Mrs. Kirsi Madi, Secretary of the UNICEF Executive Board, accompanied the delegation.

4. The objective of the visit was to observe the field operations of UNICEF in order to understand how the UNICEF country programme of cooperation contributes to the achievement of national development priorities. More specifically, the visit provided an opportunity to witness concrete examples of how UNICEF cooperates with the Government and with other partners, enabling Executive Board members to better understand the issues and challenges facing children in Nepal.

5. The delegation would like to express its gratitude to the Government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal and to the UNICEF Representative and the UNICEF country team in Nepal for the warm welcome and cooperation, as well as for the extraordinarily well organized programme.

II. Key issues facing children and women in Nepal

6. The Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal is a country of 28 million people.[1] Over half of the population is under the age of 18, and over one third is 14 years old or younger.[2] From these figures alone it becomes obvious, as one senior government official stated, "that to build a new Nepal, it certainly needs its children".

7. Nepal is going through a fundamental political and social transition. The violent conflict and civil unrest following the Maoist insurgency since 1996 has claimed about 13,000 lives. It has hampered access to basic services and restricted development assistance, and has led to the breakdown of traditional family and community networks. The election of the Constituent Assembly on 10 April 2008 marked an important milestone in the peace process ending the decade-long violent conflict. Today Nepal is a democratic federal republic. The king has stepped down; federal elections have taken place, and a coalition government has taken office. A new constitution is being drafted.

8. The development challenges for Nepal are immense. As one of the least developed countries, Nepal ranks 142 on the global Human Development Index,[3] with a gross national income (GNI) per capita in 2007 of $340.[4] In 2005, over half

[1] UNICEF data from 2006.

[2] The United States Central Intelligence Agency, *World Fact Book*.

[3] United Nations Development Fund (UNDP), *Human Development Report, 2008*.

[4] All data in this paragraph is from UNICEF, *State of the World's Children*, 2009, available at http://www.unicef.org/sowc09/.

(55 per cent) of the population of Nepal was living below the international poverty line of $1.25 per day and 77 per cent below $2 per day. The average life expectancy at birth in 2007 was a mere 64 years. This figure is far lower in the western regions of the country, where the average person can hardly hope to reach the age of 40. Nepal is highly dependant on remittances and foreign aid, and in 2006 received an estimated $514 million as official development assistance (ODA), about 6 per cent of its GNI. Furthermore, social disparity along ethnic and traditional cast boundaries is persistent. Nepal's unique geographical location, ranging from dense jungle areas 80 meters above sea level to the highest mountain peaks on earth, pose additional challenges for the population, especially in the remote villages lacking the most basic services in the far western regions. Children there learn about helicopters as means of transport long before ever seeing a car.

9. In the course of the field visit, the delegation was repeatedly told how the hardships of everyday life and the lack of improvement are the most critical impediments to the peace process. The security situation remains fragile, with the Terai region bordering India in the south of the country in security phase three. Violent incidents related to ethnic and social conflict occur in Terai almost on a daily basis. Furthermore, 'bandhs' (general strikes) disrupt the stability throughout the whole country. People block main streets and intersections in Kathmandu and the few highways in the country, and transport comes to a standstill.

10. Such mass protests can often lead to open violence. Shop lootings and incidents in which people are severely hurt or even killed occur frequently. Even though the Terai is currently Nepal's most unstable region, the insurgency started in the western regions, the poorest and the most remote areas of the country. Many observers believe that failure in improving the everyday lives of people in the western parts of the country is the largest threat to the peace process.

11. The impact of the global financial crisis is carefully monitored by Nepali officials and United Nations staff alike. So far, Nepal's economy seems largely unaffected by it. However, the first signs of potentially large numbers of migrant workers returning home from Malaysia, India, the Middle East and other parts of the world, due to increasing unemployment abroad, can already be observed. Remittances, which provide 18 per cent of gross national income, are therefore expected to drop dramatically in the future.[5] Moreover, the deteriorating world economy may have an adverse impact on revenue from tourism in 2009.

12. The Government of Nepal is strongly committed to reaching the Millennium Development Goals. However, although significant progress has been made, achieving them by 2015 seems by no means certain, mainly due to the lack of capacity and sufficient resources. Nepal has made some progress on Goal 4 (reduce child mortality): the under-five mortality declined from 91 per 1,000 live births[6] in 2000 to 61 per 1,000 live births in 2008, and the country is on track to meet its target of 48 per 1,000 live births by 2015.

13. More difficult, though not impossible, is achieving the other Goals. As for Goal 2 (universal primary education), the survival rate of 63 per cent for Nepali children attending first through fifth grades in 2000 increased to 81 per cent by 2008. There is hope that Nepal can still reach the target of 100 per cent by 2015.

[5] World Bank data for 2006.

[6] This figure and the following ones are from UNICEF.

Despite high enrolment rates in primary school, only a fraction of the children enrolled complete the fifth grade, due to the high number of dropouts.

14. Regarding Goal 3 (gender equality), the girl/boy ratio in primary education increased from 0.79 in 2000 to 0.95 in 2008. Nepal aims to achieve a ratio of 1.0 by 2015. Some progress has been made for Goal 5 (improving maternal health), with the number of births attended by skilled attendants rising from 11 per cent in 2001 to 19 per cent in 2006. However, maternal mortality remains high due to weak health systems, with limited access to emergency obstetric care, skilled attendance and the overall poor status of women. Regarding Goal 6 (fight HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases), the HIV/AIDS prevalence rate in Nepal among young people and adults aged 15-49 years has risen from 0.29 per cent in 1999 to 0.49 per cent in 2008, and is now the highest in South Asia. However, UNICEF estimates that Nepal can still reach the HIV/AIDS target of 0.2 per cent by 2015.

15. The achievement of Goal 1 (eradicate poverty and hunger) seem the most difficult. Taking the malnutrition indicator as benchmark, the level of underweight children under five was reduced only by 4 per cent, from 43 per cent in 2000 to 39 per cent in 2008. Meeting the target of 24 per cent by 2015 seems unlikely, according to UNICEF estimates. If Nepal does not accelerate its present pace of reducing the stunting prevalence rate by 0.68 per cent annually, it will reach its Goal target only by the year of 2100.

16. Others have expressed even stronger concerns, predicting already the country's failure to reach Goal 1, especially without increased external assistance. Over 50,000 children die every year, with malnutrition the major underlying cause in more than 60 per cent of cases. Half of the children in Nepal are stunted and 75 per cent of pregnant women anaemic, which directly contributes to the poor nutritional status of underweight children. There are fears that the situation could become even worse. In large areas of the country, the usual winter rains never came, and resulted in an insufficient grain harvest. Statistics over the last decade indicate severe changes in local and regional weather patterns, which have led to a decline in productivity for traditional ways of farming. Since almost half of all children in Nepal are already suffering from chronic malnutrition and 13 per cent from acute malnutrition, the challenges are immense.

17. Other figures also show that the situation for children and women in Nepal remains extremely difficult. Concerted action is needed to improve the dire situation: infant mortality is at 48 per 1,000 live births, neonatal mortality at 33 per 1,000 live births and maternal mortality at 281 per 100,000 live births. Weak health systems contribute to the high maternal mortality ratio, with limited access to emergency obstetric care, lack of skilled attendants and the overall poor nutrition and health status of women. Neonatal mortality rates are partly caused by the lack of community awareness regarding the appropriate care of newborns.

18. Access to safe water and sanitation remains largely insufficient. Only 77 per cent of the Nepali population have access to improved water supply. Despite the country's high coverage for drinking water, access to improved water for disadvantaged communities in conflict-affected rural and fringe urban areas remains low. Only 39 per cent of Nepalis have access to sanitation and only 28 per cent of schools have adequate sanitation facilities. Moreover, in the Terai region, some of the wells are contaminated by arsenic. Sample testing indicates that 55 per cent of

tube-well water and more than 80 per cent of rural piped water is microbiologically contaminated.

19. The past conflict has had a major impact on education. Forced closures of schools due to strikes reduced the school year by half in some areas. Teachers were threatened, assaulted and even killed. Thousands of students were taken from schools for political indoctrination, and some were recruited into the Maoist forces or militia. Today, 91.9 per cent of all children are enrolled in school. There has also been clear improvement in the number of enrolled children aged 5-9 years. Whereas 81.1 per cent of that age group attended class in 2001, in 2006 the number rose to 89.1 per cent. Similar progress is evident in the retention rate to grade five, improving from 59.7 per cent in 2003 to 80.3 per cent in 2006 and to 81.1 per cent in 2007. Nearly half (49.5 per cent) of all primary school children are girls. Despite the positive trend, major challenges remain, as the number of drop-outs remains high.

20. Child protection is also a major concern. Too many children are exposed to violence, abuse and exploitation, including for sexual purposes. Over 33 per cent of children are confronted with physical violence in their homes while 36 per cent of boys and 48 per cent of girls between the ages of 5 and 14 work on a regular basis. Some 48 children were injured by land mines in 2007, six of them fatally. Internal and cross-border child trafficking is on the rise. These problems, requiring urgent attention, are in part explained by the recent conflict. Children were separated from their families or lost their parents, forcing them to act as household heads for extended periods of time. These children had poorer access to basic social services and were often subject to internal displacement. In other cases, they were recruited into armed groups, causing psychosocial damage on a variety of levels, and greatly impeding their safe return and reintegration into their communities.

III. UNICEF response

21. In early 2009, UNICEF commemorated the 40th anniversary of its presence in Nepal.

22. UNICEF has 146 staff in three regional offices and nine zone offices, providing a strong field presence to support the Government of Nepal in meeting various challenges. Appearing to have a greater presence in Nepal than some of the other United Nations funds and programmes or specialized agencies, UNICEF supports programmes for children and women in all 75 districts — through either national or district-based activities, helping to realize the rights of all children and women. Its country programme strategy is guided by a human rights-based approach, with a clear focus on the poorest and most excluded groups. This certainly covers the basic needs and rights of children and young adults, including those affected by the civil unrest.

23. At the district, village and community levels, UNICEF is strongly engaged in capacity building in a number of different ways. Its focus is on promoting and protecting the welfare of children and young people, as well as enhancing their participation, and on increasing the participation of women in decision-making processes and structures, as well as on strengthening the capacities of duty bearers to fulfil their responsibilities.

24. The fragile situation of the country makes it necessary to be prepared for emergencies. Due to the earth's plate tectonics in the region, according to some experts, there is a relatively high risk for earthquakes. The UNICEF country office and the regional office for South Asia, both located in Kathmandu, have undertaken a number of measures to enhance emergency preparedness and response.

25. Accordingly, the UNICEF country programme of cooperation is structured around seven established focus areas, guided by the principles of gender mainstreaming and social inclusion:

(a) Decentralized action for children and women (DACAW);

(b) Social policy;

(c) Child protection;

(d) Education;

(e) Health and nutrition;

(f) Water, sanitation and hygiene education; and

(g) HIV/AIDS.

26. DACAW is a key approach for UNICEF in reaching out to children and woman at all levels. It aims to strengthen the capacity of families and communities, as well as local bodies and duty bearers, to plan, implement, coordinate and monitor activities aimed at the progressive realization of the rights of children and women in Nepal. Emphasizing the needs of marginalized groups, it provides a platform of convergence for sectoral interventions in 23 districts: (a) ensuring basic education, especially for girls and disadvantaged groups; (b) safeguarding women and children against violence, exploitation and abuse; (c) reducing child mortality and morbidity; (d) reducing maternal mortality; (e) improving the nutrition status of children and women; (f) improving the psychosocial and cognitive development of children; (g) increasing access to sanitation and safe water; and (h) increasing awareness of HIV/AIDS.

27. Building upon already existing strengths — the local institutions and community structures — DACAW forms an integrative, rights-based and bottom-up approach. Focusing on the most severely disadvantaged and excluded, it consists of three major strategies. Firstly, by applying the community action process, UNICEF is strengthening the capacity of individuals and communities to assess their own situation, analyse the underlying causes and plan for appropriate action. Secondly, UNICEF is strengthening the capacity of local service providers and delivery agencies to respond to the demands for change from the community. In this regard, the DACAW approach envisions a process empowering decentralized institutions and individual communities. UNICEF supports their capacity to better inform people about their rights and to improve utilization of local services. Thirdly, UNICEF is strengthening decentralized local governance in support of children and women. Local structures and mechanisms are encouraged to prepare action plans aimed at improving the well-being of children and women.

28. In implementing the DACAW approach, UNICEF is working together with different partners. Implementation is mostly through the Ministry of Local Development, which is responsible for the overall coordination of the DACAW, but UNICEF implements the DACAW approach also in cooperation with other

governmental institutions at different levels as well as other United Nations agencies, such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).

29. The social policy programme aims at strengthening the capacity of counterparts and partners to develop and implement policies, legislation and budgets that address the needs and rights of children and women, with a special focus on marginalized groups. The programme seeks to ensure that the children and young people from marginalized groups progressively benefit from improved legislation and policies that are based on evidence and influenced by the children and young people themselves. Examples of ways to influence policies and budget processes are child poverty studies and fiscal analyses of basic services while the training on children's rights for 191 newly elected women parliamentarians is an example of building capacity.

30. UNICEF has supported the creation of thousands of child clubs throughout the country. The clubs provide children aged 8-18 years with an opportunity to play and to engage in sports and cultural activities. The clubs also provide a forum for engaging in responsible community development where children can learn about their rights and responsibilities. Child clubs have participated in implementing water, sanitation and hygiene programmes, challenged discriminatory practices and early marriage, promoted the right to education and called for improvement of the school environment. They are also contributing to the drafting of the constitution.

31. Child protection remains a crucial issue requiring urgent attention. UNICEF aims at strengthening the capacities of the Government, civil society and local communities to protect children and women by focusing on three areas: (a) establishing and strengthening national, district and community-based child protection systems; (b) supporting children affected by armed conflict; and (c) developing legislation and policies for child protection.

32. In the area of child protection, UNICEF has helped to set up village and district level paralegal committees to address violence against children and women and prevent exploitation and abuse. The paralegal committees typically consist of some 15 volunteers from the community who, after receiving training from UNICEF, work to resolve such threats by employing social and legal arguments for their cause. A total of 457 village paralegal committees are currently operating in 23 districts, with technical assistance and support from district level resource groups.

33. UNICEF continues to support the return of children associated with armed groups or armed forces and their reintegration into communities. Together with other agencies, UNICEF prepares families and communities for the acceptance of the children into the communities.

34. UNICEF supports the development of social protection programmes through legislation and policies, and has been actively involved in the drafting of the Child Act, the Child Adoption Act, the Birth Registration Act and the Juvenile Justice Act. Each of these pieces of legislation has advanced the realization of children's rights.

35. The education programme aims at providing improved access to quality learning opportunities for all children, enabling in particular girls and children from disadvantaged groups to complete basic education and graduate to the lower secondary level. The specific objectives to be achieved under the current country

programme are the following: (a) children aged 3-5 years from disadvantaged communities in the 15 lowest performing districts will have increased and sustained access to early childhood development activities, thus preparing the children to start primary education; (b) children will have improved access to child-friendly schools, which is socially inclusive and gender sensitive, enabling children — particularly girls and children from disadvantaged groups — to complete basic education; (c) out-of-school children aged 6-14 years will be successfully mainstreamed into the formal education systems; and (d) the Ministry of Education will have implementation mechanisms in place to support peace education and emergency preparedness and response for education.

36. Child survival and development remain major challenges to development in Nepal. Two top priorities for UNICEF are health and nutrition. UNICEF supports the Government in improving the health and nutrition of all children by providing support to legislation and policy development. It also works to improve access to quality, high-impact child, maternal and newborn health interventions. The following specific outcomes in health and nutrition are outlined in the ongoing country programme: (a) increased numbers of poor, disadvantaged and socially excluded families in 15 districts have improved knowledge and change their behaviour regarding key child, maternal and newborn care practices; (b) capacity is enhanced at the district level for planning, managing and monitoring child, maternal and newborn health services, and for ensuring increased access for the poor, disadvantaged and socially excluded; (c) policies and programmes for maternal, neonatal and child survival within the health sector-wide approach are improved; (d) poor and socially marginalized groups have increased knowledge and skills in managing improved nutrition; and (e) capacity at the Ministry of Health and Population is enhanced for effectively managing, financing and monitoring nutrition activities and, at the district level, to plan, implement, supervise and monitor quality nutrition interventions.

37. Out of the estimated 44,000 deaths of children under the age of five, 2,200 are due to diarrhoea and 10,900 to the combined impact of diarrhoea and acute respiratory infections. Aiming to reduce the number of related illnesses and deaths, the water, sanitation and hygiene programme supports increased access to safe water supply and sanitation facilities and improved hygiene practices.

38. The HIV/AIDS programme aims to ensure that children, adolescents, pregnant women and mothers have access to prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV, paediatric AIDS, adolescent HIV/AIDS prevention, and protection and care for children affected by HIV/AIDS. The key outcomes include the following: (a) increased national capacity for response to children affected by HIV/AIDS; (b) all children identified living with HIV/AIDS and children affected by HIV/AIDS and their parents have access to comprehensive health care and support services; and (c) 80 per cent of adolescents aged 10-18 years in 15 districts have correct knowledge, relevant skills and adequate access to services to reduce their vulnerability to HIV/AIDS.

39. The total approved budget of the UNICEF country programme for the period 2008-2010 is $68,214,000. So far, $38,766,860 has already been received, with $29,447,140 still outstanding. At the time of the visit of the Executive Board, child protection and social policy were the only components relatively well funded; most other components still required a considerable amount of additional other resources.

Health and nutrition as well as water, sanitation and hygiene had received approximately 60 per cent against the funding target, while HIV/AIDS had received the least in other resources funding.

IV. Observations

A. General observations

40. One of the very first experiences the delegation made — one that was a constant during the field visit — was the sudden onset of darkness. Every evening at eight o'clock, the electrical power was shut down. Due to the drought experienced over several months, the already limited hydropower stations could not produce enough electricity for a 24-hour supply. The delegation was nearly always able to profit from almost instant back-up electricity from fuel-powered generators. However, the vast majority of Nepalis do not have access to electricity for 16 hours a day — not to mention the many people, especially in rural areas, who have no access to electricity at all. Most often, industrial production comes to a standstill, shops have to close, fridges fail to work and students can do their homework only if they can afford to light a candle. Even though limited electricity means everyday hardship for nearly everybody and represents a setback for the fragile economy, people seem to have adjusted their lives around it.

41. In Kathmandu, the delegation had the opportunity to meet with a large number of government officials (the Minister of Women, Children and Social Welfare and his staff; the Minister of Health and Population and his senior staff; senior officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Education, the National Planning Commission and the Ministry of Local Development, among others). During the interesting and open in-depth exchanges, government officials expressed their full commitment to addressing the challenges faced by children and women. There is a deep gratitude towards the United Nations organizations in general and UNICEF in particular for supporting policies, strategies and structures set up by the Government. The delegation was able to observe the good partnerships that UNICEF has been able to establish with all key government counterparts.

42. The coordinating and advisory body for development in Nepal is the National Planning Commission, under the direction of the National Development Council. The Executive Board members were pleased to meet with the Vice-Chair of the Commission, Prof. Dr. Gunanidhi Sharma. The National Planning Commission allocates resources for development and also acts as the central agency for monitoring and evaluation of development plans, policies and programmes. At district level, the District Development Committee is the intermediate body allocating and conducting policies, programmes and funds at the village level.

B. Field visits

43. *Shree Maheswar Lower Secondary School*. The white UNICEF four-wheel drives used by the delegation had to use their full power to get up the steep and narrow one track road to the Shree Maheswar Lower Secondary School. Yet the effort to get there was certainly worthwhile. This school is one of the first in the country to lead a campaign to make its catchment area 'open defecation free', through the school-led total sanitation campaign. UNICEF is the founder of the programme and supports it strongly at the district and village levels. Through the

programme, students from the school have formed child clubs, and are at the forefront of the effort to encourage construction of latrines in every home and to discourage open defecation. Sanitation and hand-washing facilities have been installed at the school, supported by programme communication aimed at behaviour change. With impressive confidence and pride, the students presented their achievements to the delegation. With such dedication, the UNICEF slogan, 'Using the power of children as agent of change', becomes reality. The programme helps to raise awareness about the importance of hygiene and sanitation both in schools and at home, and has resulted in improved health, a safer environment, increased educational standards, higher girls' enrolment and retention, and greater community ownership.

44. *Child Contact Centre at Matepani.* At the contact centre for out-of-school children, run with the assistance of the Pokhara Chamber of Commerce and Industry, UNICEF supports two 10-month catch-up classes particularly targeting working children, enabling them to become enrolled in regular schools after two years. The urban out-of-school programme is run with the support of three partner organizations: (a) the Pokhara Chamber of Commerce and Industry implements the programme and the day-to-day operation of the classes and the contact centre, including staff (programme coordinator and community organizers); (b) UNICEF offers financial support for training and technical support, including text books and other teaching and learning materials, as well as monitoring and supervision; (c) World Education, a non-governmental organization (NGO), helps to run the contact centre and provides partial financial support for the salaries of the facilitators and supervisors. It has established a database of children enrolled in the programme and a child tracking system for follow-up and further support. World Education also provides support for formal schooling, apprenticeship and vocational training.

45. *Early Childhood Development Centre in Kalika.* Located on a small mountain plateau overseeing the Pokhara valley, the small community hall housing the early childhood centre in the remote village of Kalika. There the mothers learn how to better care for their babies, including the importance of sufficient and appropriate nutrition. The children of the village are weighed and measured regularly, enabling mothers to monitor whether the children are underweight or falling behind in growth. If the results raise concern, the women as a group try to identify the cause and to find a solution. This early childhood development centre is an example of the work done by DACAW-supported community organizations. After training the voluntary community organizer as a facilitator, UNICEF continues to monitor progress through regular visits.

46. *Primary Health Care Center in Dhuley Gaunda.* Equipped to provide basic health services, including routine immunization, the health care centre in Dhuley Gaunda operates a mother child health clinic and handles deliveries. The delegation visited the health care centre on 4 April, which coincided with the national polio immunization days in the Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal. The delegation helped administer polio drops to some of the many children awaiting their turn to receive the oral vaccine. The detection of a few cases of wild polio virus in 2005, following five years without any case, indicated the continuing challenge of cross-border transmission along the border with India, one of four countries in the world where polio remains endemic.

47. *Shree Khairenitar Mahila Bahuddeshiya Sahakari Sanstha Limited (women's federation).* With a membership of 1,063 women from 207 organizations, this women's federation provides a forum that brings together women's groups to initiate their own agenda towards a common goal and to take collective action on children's and women issues. The Federation serves as a model for the country, and was awarded a Department of Women's development prize in 2008.

48. *Paralegal committee.* In the village of Barbhanjyang, the delegation had the opportunity to meet with a paralegal committee that had been established to address issues of abuse and exploitation as well as violence and discrimination against children and women in the village. The members of the paralegal committees are all volunteers from the village, trained by the district resource group to address issues related to children and women at the village level. Supported by UNICEF, the village-level paralegal committees contribute to the broader district-level protection system, through which the paralegal committees can obtain legal assistance and guidance from legal experts. So far, the paralegal committee has dealt with 15 cases, solving 14 cases and referring one case to the district.

49. During the meeting with the paralegal committee, the delegation was impressed by a 12-year-old girl who, standing up in front of literally half of her village, presented the work of the newly founded youth club. She did not read from a prepared statement nor did she repeat what adults had told her. She simply described how she and her comrades were lobbying for better sanitation and hygiene and were engaged in raising children's issues in the village committees. This authentic and credible presentation was not the only one the delegation heard during the field visit. In Damauli, the delegation engaged in an in-depth discussion with teenage members of the district child club network forum about their future perspectives. In Khairentar, the members of the Executive Board were welcomed by the local women's federation and learned about its success in empowering women.

50. In many villages, local officials proudly presented statistics they had aggregated on their own, indicating the progress in development they had achieved. Tables and charts were carefully drawn on large papers and presented on walls. Even though sustained questioning revealed certain inaccuracies in the numbers, the positive trends presented appeared solid and reliable.

C. The United Nations country team

51. The United Nations country team (UNCT) in Nepal consists of all 19 United Nations agencies present in the Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal today. Additionally, the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, and the International Monetary Fund are members of the expanded UNCT. The Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations in 1951 was the first United Nations agency to open an office in Nepal; the latest, since August 2008, is the United Nations Office of Disarmament Affairs, with its Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Asia and the Pacific.

52. The United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF), covering a three-year period from 1 January 2008 to 31 December 2010, and existing coordination mechanisms provide a forum for inter-agency coordination and harmonization of efforts between all actors involved in supporting development activities in Nepal. The UNDAF emphasizes reaching socially excluded and marginalized groups, as well as reducing inequalities and promoting social

inclusion. There are four priority outcomes within the UNDAF: (a) consolidating peace; (b) quality basic services; (c) sustainable livelihoods; and (d) human rights, gender equality and social inclusion, to address the root causes of conflict and poverty. The UNDAF is being extended beyond 2010, to align it with the new National Development Strategy, which will be presented at the Nepal Development Forum in May 2009. The three pillars of the Nepal Development Strategy are the following: (a) consolidating the peacebuilding process; (b) creating a development roadmap from transition to transformation; and (c) implementing economic reforms to recast economic development, trade and investment.

53. The UNCT, chaired by the Resident Coordinator, meets every fortnight, addressing strategic issues, such as unemployment and decentralized governance. Specific topics are addressed and coordinated within the theme groups. International financial institutions, such as the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank, are invited to every second meeting of the UNCT. The security management team meets every two weeks before the UNCT meeting.

54. UNICEF is an active member of the UNCT, and currently co-chairs two UNDAF theme groups (consolidating peace and quality basic services). It also leads the United Nations learning team on HIV/AIDS, chairs the United Nations communication team, and manages the United Nations radio in Nepal. UNICEF also leads one of the four pilot districts for enhanced collaboration in the field, in Kapilbastu, and provides significant support to the working group on harmonized cash transfers.

55. UNICEF also closely cooperates with United Nations Mission in Nepal, particularly on issues related to children affected by armed conflict.

56. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) is an inter-agency forum for coordination, policy development and decision-making between the United Nations and other humanitarian partners, such as the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and the World Bank. The IASC mechanism in Nepal, established in 2006, continues to meet every month, involving key members at the head of country office level, and convenes additional meetings as necessary. In addition, the IASC operational team meets every week with designated cluster leads and other humanitarian focal points within the agencies. The disaster management team is a forum for coordination of emergency response and preparedness, and disaster mitigation activities. Its members include all relevant United Nations agencies, including UNICEF, the International Organization for Migration, interested international NGOs, and donors.

57. Since 1996, an association of international NGOs, comprising more than 60 organizations, has been an informal yet vital actor in the development sector. Implementing various development programmes throughout the country, the association aims to promote mutual understanding and harmony within the country, and serves as a knowledge database and forum for its members.

D. UNICEF regional office for South Asia

58. The delegation had the opportunity to meet with the UNICEF Regional Director for South Asia and his senior regional advisors, who described how the work of UNICEF in Nepal fits into the greater framework of the South Asian countries covered by the regional office for South Asia (ROSA).

59. ROSA offers strategic direction, programme guidance, management, and oversight to the UNICEF country offices in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Providing regional leadership and advancing the UNICEF core mandate of advocating on behalf of children in the South Asian context, ROSA also deals with external relations and partnerships in the regional context.

60. The delegation was briefed on the UNICEF response to the challenges for children in South Asian countries, particularly related to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals 1, 2, 4, 5 and 7. In the social policy context, Nepal faces one of the most difficult challenges, with its gross domestic product growing the least, compared to other South Asian countries. Related to child protection, the focus is on child trafficking, juvenile justice, child marriage, and sexual abuse and sexual exploitation of children. In Nepal, of particular concern are juvenile justice, children at risk, child labour, and children associated with armed forces or armed groups.

61. Significant progress has been achieved for Goal 2 and gender parity has been reached in schools across the region. However a number of challenges remain: access to services, caste, quality of education, high drop-out rates and conflicts, threatening the progress already achieved. Moreover, the HIV/AIDS prevalence rate has been rising due to drug use. In terms of health, nutrition and sanitation, the indicators in South Asia are similar to the indicators for sub-Saharan Africa.

V. Conclusions

62. The delegation spent nine intensive days in Nepal, and had many interesting in-depth discussions with very knowledgeable and dedicated men, women and children at all levels. UNICEF provided deep insight into its work in the field and gave the delegation a detailed picture of its engagement in the country. The delegation left with the strong impression that the programmes UNICEF supported in Nepal make a difference in the everyday life of the people there — especially at the village level, where people benefit most directly. It was evident from the interactions with a range of counterparts, partners and beneficiaries, including government officials and United Nations agencies, that the role of UNICEF in Nepal is very much appreciated.

63. The purpose of the field visit was not to make a comprehensive and independent evaluation of the UNICEF programme in Nepal, but to observe first-hand the programme delivery and activities within the context of the country's national development priorities. Therefore, the delegation remains reluctant to propose a concrete recommendation. However, the observations above led to the following conclusions, which might give the distinguished members of the Executive Board guidance for assessing UNICEF work in general and its ongoing engagement in Nepal in particular.

64. The likelihood of Nepal not reaching Millennium Development Goal 1 by 2015 needs to be taken very seriously. UNICEF could play a larger role in helping Nepal achieve all the Goals if underfunded sectors, such as health and nutrition, received more financial and technical support from both the Government and the international community.

65. UNICEF has strong field presence, reaching out to the children and women at all levels. Village officials and beneficiaries alike regularly stressed the importance of having a UNICEF presence. In the Kaski district, people were concerned that UNICEF might reduce its presence there due to improvements that have taken place in the district. The delegation believes that major challenges still remain, particularly in the Kaski district, despite the progress made. Since resources are limited and the challenges are even greater in other regions of Nepal, the UNICEF strategy of gradually phasing out its presence in the Kaski district seems responsible. Structures have been set up in the communities for the people to continue the valuable work begun on education, participation and health care, especially for mothers and their babies.

66. The field presence of UNICEF is highly appreciated. However, since resources are limited, UNICEF certainly cannot be present in every village or even district. The delegation believes UNICEF is using, supporting and strengthening the existing systems at all levels.

67. Again and again, the delegation was told that capacity building was one of the key factors for enhancing development at the district and village levels. Enabling people to identify and decide how to achieve further improvement seemed to be a crucial and valuable element of any engagement of UNICEF and the United Nations system in general. While UNICEF is strongly engaged in capacity building at the village level, the delegation did not see any other United Nations entities involved in this task. UNDP support for decentralization has recently moved from direct field support to programmatic and national decentralization policy support.

68. While the empowerment of women in Nepal seems to be recognized as an important factor for the country's development at all levels, the presence of women, especially as decision-makers is still low — particularly at the district and national levels. Enabling women to generate their own income would be an important step towards women's empowerment, as the delegation so eloquently heard from a representative of the women's federation. The delegation heard a number of times from beneficiaries about the importance of microcredit as an instrument for achieving empowerment. While UNICEF does not have a particular expertise in this field, cooperation with international and regional financial institutions, such as the World Bank or the Asian Development Bank, should be considered seriously.

69. The delegation believes that UNICEF, in close cooperation with other relevant actors, has a crucial role to play in advocating and promoting a holistic approach to child protection, including addressing concerns such as child labour and child trafficking.

70. The programme of the field visit inevitably had to be tightly scheduled, as time and resources were limited. In a few occasions, this meant that the delegation did not have enough time to interact with local people, since official presentations took longer than expected. Therefore, the delegation recommends, if possible, that field visits plan for more local meetings and longer direct interaction with children, women and men involved in the programmes on the ground.

Annex 1

List of participants in the field visit to Nepal

H.E. Mr. Mikhail Savostianov (Head of Delegation)
Deputy Permanent Representative, Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary
Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation to the United Nations

Mr. Markus Weidling
Counsellor, Permanent Mission of Germany to the United Nations

Ms. Allison Booker
First Secretary, Permanent Mission of the Bahamas to the United Nations

Mr. Yoseph Kassaye
First Secretary, Permanent Mission of Ethiopia to the United Nations

Mr. Changfeng Shao
Second Secretary, Permanent Mission of the People's Republic of China to the United Nations

Ms. Elena Manfrina
Programme Manager, Global Institutions, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, Federal Department of Foreign Affairs of Switzerland

Mrs. Kirsi Madi
Secretary of the Executive Board of UNICEF

Annex 2

Summary of the programme of the field visit to Nepal

Monday, 30 March (Kathmandu)

1. Briefing on health and security
2. Meeting with UNICEF country management team

Tuesday, 31 March (Kathmandu)

1. Briefing on UNICEF as a member of the United Nations country team in Nepal
2. Briefing on UNICEF programmes in Nepal
3. Meeting with UNICEF country office staff
4. Meeting with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs
5. Meeting with the National Planning Commission
6. Meeting with the Vice-Chairperson of the Committee on the Rights of the Child

Wednesday, 1 April (Kathmandu)

1. Meeting with the heads of agencies of the United Nations country team
2. Meeting with the Minister of Women, Children and Social Welfare
3. Meeting with civil society partners
4. Meeting with the Representative of the Secretary-General and the United Nations Mission in Nepal
5. Meeting with the Ministry of Local Development
6. Meeting with Government officials and members of the diplomatic community as well as United Nations and civil society partners

Thursday, 2 April (Kathmandu, Pumdi Bhumdi, Phulbari, Pokhara)

1. Visit to Shree Maheswari Lower Secondary School in Pumdi Bhumdi to learn from students about the school-led sanitation campaign and success in making their village 'open defecation free'
2. Visit to the Matepani Child Contact Centre in Phulpari to meet with out-of-school working children and to interact with the members of the Pokhara Chamber of Commerce and Industry
3. Briefing and discussion on the UNICEF partnership with the Kaski District Development Committee
4. Meeting with officials and partners of Pokhara municipality and the Kaski district

Friday, 3 April (Kalika, Pokhara)

1. Interaction in the village of Kalika with members of the Bishwakarma community organization and with female community health volunteers and members of the community to learn about UNICEF-supported community

services in the village, such as growth monitoring, newborn care, early childhood development and the community information board

2. Interaction with the Kalika Village Development Committee

3. Meeting with UNICEF staff working in the Kaski district

Saturday, 4 April (Pokhara, Dhuley Gaunda, Kharenitar, Damauli, Bandipur)

1. Visit to the Primary Health Care Centre in Dhuley Guanda, Tanahun district to observe and participate in the administration of polio drops as part of National Immunization Days

2. Interaction in Khairenitar with members of the Shree Khairenitar Mahila Bahuddeshiya Sahakari Sanstra (Women's Federation), to learn about actions taken to address children's and women's issues, including income-generating activities

3. Meeting with officials of the Khairenitar Village Development Committee and stakeholders involved in child-friendly local governance

4. Meeting in Vyas municipality with the District Development Committee, DACAW District Coordination and District Resource Group to learn about activities undertaken with UNICEF support

5. Interaction with children from the District Child Club Network Forum to learn about activities related to mine action, mine risk education, support to children affected by armed conflict, prevention of early marriage, prevention of HIV/AIDS and contribution to the drafting of the new constitution

Sunday, 5 April (Bandipur, Barbhanjyang, Bharatpur, Chitwan)

1. Interaction in Barbhanjyang village with members of the paralegal committee of the Village Development Committee to learn about activities to address violence, abuse, exploitation and discrimination against children and women — Meeting in Bharatpur with UNICEF central and western regional zone office staff

Monday, 6 April (Chitwan, Kathmandu)

1. Meeting with senior staff at the UNICEF regional office for South Asia

Tuesday, 7 April (Kathmandu)

1. Meeting with the United Nations Resident Coordinator

2. Meeting with the Ministry of Education

3. Meeting with representatives of bilateral and multilateral donors

4. Meeting with the Minister of Health and Population

5. Debriefing with section chiefs and programme staff of the UNICEF country office

6. Meeting with the Regional Director and members of the diplomatic community and the Representative of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation

Wednesday, 8 April (Kathmandu)

1. Visit to the historical Patan Durbar Square area